

# *City of Alexandria, Virginia*

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## **MEMORANDUM**

DATE: SEPTEMBER 9, 2013

TO: MEMBERS OF THE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

FROM: JOEL MARCUSON, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, T&ES

SUBJECT: AGENDA ITEM #5 – DASH COMPREHENSIVE OPERATIONS ANALYSIS (COA) UPDATE

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**ISSUE:** Update on the DASH Comprehensive Operations Analysis (COA).

**RECOMMENDATION:** That the Transportation Commission receive the report.

**DISCUSSION:** The City of Alexandria (the City) and Alexandria Transit Company (ATC) hired Transportation Management and Design, Inc. (TMD) in October 2012 to conduct a Comprehensive Operations Analysis (COA) of the DASH bus system. The last complete COA of the DASH bus system was conducted in 2005 with additional onboard data collected in 2008.

### **Study Purpose**

The study includes an evaluation of all existing data and previous studies, collection of a complete set of new data based on current service, and development of short and long range recommendations to improve and expand service in the future. The goal of this project is to develop and prioritize short and long range solutions to improve the quality, efficiency, and effectiveness of the ATC network and that would address the following issues:

1. Service frequency
2. Travel times
3. On-time performance
4. Connectivity
5. Productivity
6. Latent demand or underserved areas
7. Overcrowding
8. Underutilized service
9. Planned high capacity transitway improvements

### **Public Outreach**

An early project component is to conduct stakeholder outreach as well as collect

information from riders and non-riders. The following is a brief description of the public outreach activities initiated to-date:

*Stakeholder Interviews:* The consultant team conducted interviews in March/April 2013 with key stakeholders to offer an overview of the project and get feedback on service and network priorities, as well as DASH's role within the community and region. The stakeholders included the ATC Board of Directors, members of various City commissions including the Environmental Policy Commission, Transportation Commission, Commission on Persons with Disabilities, and Commission on Aging, ATC staff and drivers, Alexandria Community Public Schools, business representatives (including the Chamber of Commerce, Alexandria Economic Development Partnership, Small Business Development Center, West End Business Association, Old Town Business & Professional Association, Del Ray Business Association, Eisenhower Partnership, and Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association), Inova Hospital and City staff. The following are key findings based on the stakeholder interviews:

- DASH is well regarded and has a positive image across stakeholder groups.
- DASH's interface with Metrorail is important and circulator service to stations could serve recent development.
- DASH plays an important role in supporting economic development, especially near Metrorail stations and other major developments (e.g., Potomac Yard, Landmark Mall).
- DASH has a role in maintaining people's independence, especially for persons with disabilities and seniors.
- Service frequency should be improved, especially on routes with higher ridership.
- There are opportunities to expand service to areas outside of the City that are major trip generators, such as Shirlington.
- Connectivity between corridors is sometimes difficult, and additional north-south crosstown routes would be helpful.
- Additional bus shelters are needed throughout the City and shelters should be upgraded at Metrorail stations.
- In some locations, such as King Street, bus stops are too closely spaced.
- Technology should be improved, such as the use of Phone apps and a real-time information system.
- Fare policy should be tied to a farebox recovery ratio target.

Both On-Board (Rider) Surveys and Telephone Surveys were conducted in the Spring 2013. The results of these surveys will be reported in a separate memo or in conjunction with upcoming community meetings.

*On-board (Rider) Survey:* In addition to the stakeholder input, TMD conducted on-board rider surveys in Spring 2013. The rider survey will be used to obtain demographic characteristics, origin and destination information, other key travel behavior data and satisfaction of current riders. The survey results will be complete in early Fall.

*Telephone Survey:* A telephone survey was conducted in May 2013 to gather input from

both riders and non-riders on how transit can be enhanced to better serve the needs of Alexandria residents. The survey was administered to a random sampling of over 707 residents. Below are some key findings of the survey:

- The vast majority indicated that public transit is an important service (a) to get people to work; (b) to help reduce congestion; or (c) to improve mobility for low income persons and seniors.
- Of those who had used DASH, 80 percent rated the DASH route network as good or excellent, while 69 percent rated the schedule as good or excellent.
- The main reason keeping people from using DASH was a preference to drive, service is not offered to places they need to go, and service is not frequent enough.
- When asked what would encourage them to use DASH at least once a week, the top answer was having a transit stop closer to their work location, followed by more frequent service and employer incentives.
- The majority of respondents agreed that it is very important for the City to support and fund DASH bus service.
- About one-quarter of respondents were very supportive of an increase in taxes to expand DASH service, while another one-third were somewhat supportive.

*Additional Public Outreach:* The City and DASH are currently conducting a broader online survey to introduce the project to the general public and get input on priorities for DASH service and expansion. The survey includes questions similar to those used for the stakeholder interviews and telephone survey. To date, over 500 surveys have been completed online.

Three public meetings will be held over the course of the project to gather input on existing service and the proposed recommendations. The first public meetings will be held on September 11 and 12, 2013, at the Dr. Oswald Durant Memorial Center and Landmark Mall, respectively. This meeting will serve to provide an overview of the project, share results from the stakeholder outreach and surveys, and receive initial input on key issues and needs for the system.

### **Next Steps**

The project team continues to evaluate the data collected throughout the spring and summer. A market analysis is underway that will determine transit demand based on market segmentation, travel patterns and transit competitiveness. Both short- and long-term recommendations will be developed that improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the existing service. These may include modified or new route alignments, service frequencies and spans, and vehicle requirements.

The short and long range plan recommendations will be presented to the Commission and Council in Winter 2013/2014 for information and will be presented to the ATC Board for consideration of adoption into ATC's long range expansion plan in early 2014.